

REMARKS

This application has been carefully reviewed in light of the Office Action dated June 27, 2003. Claims 1 to 20 are in the application, with Claims 1, 2, 7 to 9, 14, 15 and 20 being the independent claims. Reconsideration and further examination are respectfully requested.

Applicants thank the Examiner for the indication that Claims 2 and 9 contain allowable subject matter. In keeping with this indication, Claims 2 and 9 have been rewritten in independent form. Accordingly Claims 2 and 9 are believed to be in condition for allowance.

Newly-added Claim 20 contains all of the recited steps of allowable Claim 2. Accordingly, Claim 20 is also believed to be in condition for allowance.

Claims 1, 3 to 8, 10 to 15, 17 and 19 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) over U.S. Patent No. 6,300,555 (Kondo) in view of U.S. Patent No. 6,204,443 (Kiso); and Claims 16 and 18 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) over Kondo and Kiso in view of U.S. Patent No. 5,712,572 (Tamechika). The rejections are respectfully traversed.

The present invention as recited by Claims 1 and 7 concerns a method for testing a solar cell panel having a solar cell and an outer housing (Claim 1) or a method for inspecting a solar cell panel generating system having such a solar panel (Claim 7). The method includes performing one of a withstand voltage test and an insulation resistance test between a live electrical section electrically connected to the solar cell and a conductor section of the outer housing; and thereafter applying a voltage between the live electrical section and the conductor section.

The present invention as recited by Claims 8 and 14 concerns an apparatus for testing a solar cell panel having a solar cell and an outer housing (Claim 8) or an apparatus for inspecting a solar cell panel generating system having such a solar panel (Claim 14). The apparatus includes a means for performing one of a withstand voltage test and insulation resistance test between a live electrical section electrically connected to the solar cell and a conductor section of the outer housing. The apparatus also includes a means for applying a voltage between the live electrical section and the conductor section after the one of the withstand voltage test and the insulation resistance test has been performed.

The present invention as recited by Claim 15 concerns a method for manufacturing a solar panel having a solar cell, a surface protective covering member for encapsulating the solar cell, and an outer housing. The method includes encapsulating the solar cell with the surface protective covering member, performing one of a withstand voltage test and an insulation resistance test between a live electrical section electrically connected to the solar cell and a conductor section of the outer housing; and thereafter applying a voltage between the live electrical section and the conductor section.

Thus, according to one feature of the invention, a voltage is applied between the live electrical section and the conductor section after the withstand voltage test or the insulation resistance test has been performed. By virtue of this feature, the residual charge from the withstand voltage test or the insulation resistance test can be quickly and effectively reduced. See, for example, page 8, lines 6 to 19 of the present specification.

The Office Action places reliance on Kiso for the foregoing feature. Applicants respectfully submit that such reliance is misplaced.

The portion of Kiso relied upon by the Office Action (col. 18, lines 58 to 65) describes applying a voltage of 2000 V between a solar cell module power input and an electrolyte solution. However, contrary to the position taken in the Office Action, the voltage of 2000 V is not applied subsequent to the voltage breakdown test. Rather, the voltage of 2000 V is applied during the voltage breakdown test; the voltage breakdown test itself is carried out by applying the voltage of 2000 V. Nowhere is Kiso seen to disclose applying a voltage to the solar cell module and the electrolyte solution after the voltage breakdown test has been performed.

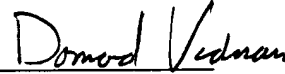
The method described in Kiso can be contrasted to Embodiment 1 of the present invention, in which a withstand voltage test is performed using a voltage of 2200 V (with a rate of increase of 500 V/s), and thereafter, a 1 V alternating current is applied to remove residual charge. See page 20, lines 9 to 24 of the present specification. Of course, the invention is not limited to the disclosed embodiments.

Kondo and Tamechika are not seen to remedy the deficiencies of Kiso. Applicants therefore conclude that the applied documents do not teach or suggest the claimed invention, either singly or in the combination proposed by the Office Action, and it is respectfully requested that the Section 103 rejections be withdrawn.

No other matters being raised, the entire application is believed to be in condition for allowance, and such action is courteously solicited.

Applicants' undersigned attorney may be reached in our Washington, D.C. office by telephone at (202) 530-1010. All correspondence should continue to be directed to our below-listed address.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Damond Vadnais", is written over a horizontal line.

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